



**Left:** Manley shot this head-on view with a surprisingly short focal length of 80mm — meaning he was very close to the oncoming skier. Taken with a Nikon D200, it ran on the January 2009 cover of *Ski Press* magazine (above).

## SNOW KING

A master of ski photography shares the secrets behind his dramatic winter-sports action shots

BY RUSSELL HART

► Photographers love the way snow transforms a landscape but often fear the technical hurdles to making good pictures of it and in it. Add to that the challenge of freezing fast-moving winter-sports subjects, and snow can be as intimidating to photographers as it is inviting.

In his work as a photographer specializing in ski-related subjects, North Vancouver, British Columbia-based Jordan Manley faces these issues head-on.

Shooting for magazines such as *Powder* and *Skiing*, as well as for commercial clients such as GORE-TEX, Oakley and Helly Hansen, Manley manages to make his technique invisible — all the better to highlight the grace and drama of the sport. We asked the 24-year-old photographer for general tips about shooting in snow and specific tips about how to nail action on the slopes.

■ **When your subject contains large amounts of white snow, increase your camera-metered**

**exposure by one to two stops.**

“Modern matrix meters have improved exposure accuracy overall, but I still find myself shooting above what the meter is telling me. I combine the meter reading with a quick look at a test shot on the camera’s LCD — keeping in mind that the screen will show less highlight detail because my eyes are adjusted to bright daylight.”

■ **Set a shutter speed of at least 1/1,000 of a second to freeze a fast-moving skier.**

“I generally use a shutter speed of 1/1,600 of a second, which will stop the action with tack precision. If the subject is coming straight at you, you can get away with less than 1/1,000 of a second, especially if the lens is on the wide side.”

■ **Don't be afraid to increase ISO so you can set a high shutter speed for fast-moving subjects.**

“With the improvements to high-ISO image quality found in many new cameras, you might be able to go as high as ISO 3200 to achieve whatever combination of aperture and shutter speed is needed. Research your particular camera model to learn at what ISO setting it starts to produce objectionable noise.”

■ **Be careful to keep snow off the lens' front element when you're shooting, and protect the camera body when you're changing lenses.**

“Point the camera downward when



**Right:** Though this backlit image of a plummeting skier (from *Powder* magazine's 2009 Buyer's Guide, above) was shot at 1/1,000 of a second, Manley tries to use 1/1,600 of a second when possible to ensure sharp results with the fastest ski action.

you're waiting to take a shot. When you change lenses, do it quickly, and lean over your camera to prevent snow from falling in. Don't ski around with your camera around your neck — keep it in a camera bag that allows you to ski freely and gives you ease of access."

▣ **Use focus tracking to shoot a skier who's coming right at you, but prefocus if you know where the skier will be at the instant you take the picture.**

"If you're photographing a particular skier — say a friend or family member — talk with him or her to plot where he or she will ski so you can plan your shot. Then you can set the focus manually at that distance, so the camera isn't trying to autofocus before it fires. When I work with athletes, we always discuss where I want them to ski and sometimes throw snowballs to mark that point in the snow."

▣ **You don't need supertelephoto lenses for good ski photography.**

"The 80-20mm f/2.8 zoom is my bread-and-butter lens. Its range has the ability both to highlight the action and to suck in a beautiful feature in the background. Sometimes I'll use a 300mm, but more frequently I use 50mm, 17-35mm and fisheye lenses. I prefer to get closer and pack less weight."

▣ **Use a camera with a fast framing rate to**



**capture skiers at the peak of the action.**

"I think you need anywhere from 5 to 8 fps. That allows you to pick out the best of the bunch and chuck the rest. And shoot a burst of at least three frames as the skier moves through."

▣ **Try to shoot by sidelight or backlight.**

"What's really important is the dynamic between light and snow, specifically the snow that skiers churn up as they move through the frame. It's important to envision before the shot how the skier will throw snow and how the light will interact with that snow. Generally side lighting or backlighting — and fresh, untracked snow — produces the most dramatic results and

also improves the sense of texture on the snow's surface."

▣ **You can still create a strong composition even when you have to think about exposure, shutter speed and timing.**

"Once you've picked the spot where you want to shoot a skier, try to visualize the athlete coming through the frame, and when you're shooting try to keep him or her in the same position in the frame. Always try to fuse the beauty of your particular location with the sports action. Digital photography makes it really easy to shoot a test frame and be sure everything is exactly the way you want it before the action takes place." AP